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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 5, 2014

National Influenza Vaccination Week December 7-13, 2014

It's not too late to get a flu shot!

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Division of Immunization Services is encouraging individuals to get their flu shot as part of National Influenza Vaccination Week, December 7-13.

According to recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Services (CDC), the Influenza A H3N2 flu virus most common during the flu season appears to have transformed, making the shot less effective than usual. The Influenza A H3N2 strain tends to cause more deaths and hospitalizations, especially in the elderly.

"We are still strongly recommending that residents get a flu vaccination this year even though the vaccine's ability to protect against Influenza A H3N2 viruses may be reduced," said Dr. Letitia Tierney, State Health Officer and Commissioner for the Bureau for Public Health. "We know that vaccination has been found to provide some protection against drifted viruses in past seasons in addition to offering protection against other flu viruses later in the season."

The Bureau for Public Health is asking doctors to be on the look-out for patients who may be at higher risk for flu complications, including children younger than 2, adults 65 and older, and people with asthma, heart disease, weakened immune systems or certain other chronic conditions. Such patients should be seen promptly and treated quickly with antiviral medications as these medicines are most effective if taken within two days of the onset of symptoms. They can help lessen the severity of symptoms and reduce the risk of hospitalization or death.

While the severity of a flu season is difficult to predict, health officials say West Virginia is one of the best prepared to handle an outbreak. The CDC ranks West Virginia third among states in 2013 for having the highest number of adults immunized against the flu at 52 percent. The average among other states is 42 percent.

The flu season typically starts in November or December and can last well into spring.

As always, you can help stop the spread of germs by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Trying to avoid close contact with sick people
- Practicing good health habits
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze

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